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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 15, 2005

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MASSACHUSETTS RELEASES VISION FOR INCREASED SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT AND PRESERVATION

Environmental agencies seek input on forest reserve sites on state land

Environmental Affairs Secretary Ellen Roy Herzfelder today announced plans for what will lead to a balanced approach in the management of the existing 500,000 acres of state-owned forestland. The approach includes expanding sustainable harvesting on 80% of forested state lands (or "working woodlands"), coupled with the establishment of large and small reserves on the remaining 20%.

"A balanced forest management approach that can be supported by environmental and forest industry groups must include both reserves and sustainable forestry," said Herzfelder.

The proposal is required under the state's "Green Certification" program. Green Certification is the highest environmental forestry designation. The state received the designation – one of only a handful of states in the nation – in May of 2004 after a forest management review by the independent Forest Stewardship Council.

The designation requires the state to complete forest management plans for all 500,000 acres within five years, and to establish a system of representative forest reserves to be set aside from commercial forestry. The designation of *reserve* signifies those areas where management focuses on restoring native habitat, removing foreign "invasive species" and studying undisturbed natural forest processes. The results of these studies will help improve low-impact forestry on "working woodlands".

Massachusetts has conducted a scientific analysis of forestlands that are appropriate for increased sustainable forestry and forest reserves. In conducting this analysis, agencies used The Nature Conservancy's existing scientific data on Massachusetts' forests, saving the state both time and resources. In completing forest management plans, the state estimates that about 10%

of the forests will be designated in small reserves around specific unique resources such as rare species habitat.

In large forest reserves, Secretary Roy Herzfelder is proposing the designation of approximately 50,000 acres (10%), each up to several thousand acres in size. The purpose of these large reserves is to study natural processes that will help improve sustainable forestry practices on state lands, and to offer the public outstanding examples of the major forest types in Massachusetts. The state will ask for assistance from the private sector in completing baseline inventories of the forest reserves so that their research purposes can be achieved.

In the future, the state hopes to have eight reserves of 15,000 acres. To accomplish this, agencies plan to work cooperatively with interested non-profits, municipalities and private landowners to protect additional forestland adjacent to these state designations.

Just as important to this comprehensive plan for the reserves, is fully implementing sustainable forestry on the remaining 400,000 acres of state land. Forest analysis and public meetings have already begun to complete plans that will guide this management, which is also reviewed by the independent Forest Stewardship Council annually.

Currently, state-of-the-art forestry occurs on a portion of lands where sustainable forestry is appropriate. As plans are completed, the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Department of Fish and Game will expand this management closer to levels that are sustainable. Sustainable management improves forest health and enhances habitat for a wide range of species. Sustainable management also helps support local economies and will make the Commonwealth less dependent on imported forest products, which are often harvested under poor environmental oversight.

Although Massachusetts is the eighth most forested state in the U.S., its forests currently supply less than 5% of its citizens' forest product needs. Conversely, New Hampshire supplies 100% of its forest products needs. Under the state's new "working woodlands" proposal, the amount of wood harvested on state lands could triple from current levels and still be well within sustainable levels.

Sustainable forestry can also play a key role in preservation. Forest advocates hope to follow the lead of the Massachusetts' agricultural industry, which helps protect farmland from development by keeping farms viable as businesses. These efforts have helped sustain the farmland base, and have raised Massachusetts to third in the nation in direct local farm sales.

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